



# Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie

*Wade Davis , Richard Evans Schultes (Preface by)*

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In 1982, Harvard-trained ethnobotanist Wade Davis traveled into the Haitian countryside to research reports of zombies--the infamous living dead of Haitian folklore. A report by a team of physicians of a verifiable case of zombification led him to try to obtain the poison associated with the process and examine it for potential medical use.

Interdisciplinary in nature, this study reveals a network of power relations reaching all levels of Haitian political life. It sheds light on recent Haitian political history, including the meteoric rise under Duvalier of the Tonton Macoute. By explaining zombification as a rational process within the context of traditional Vodoun society, Davis demystifies one of the most exploited of folk beliefs, one that has been used to denigrate an entire people and their religion.

## Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie Details

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## From Reader Review Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie for online ebook

### mark says

Wade Davis, anthropologist/ethnobotanist, weaves together pharmacology, medicine, political theory, sociology of religion, etc., to tell the fascinating story of how zombies are made in Haiti - real zombies, not the Hollywood version.

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### David says

Zombies are all the rage these days. Heck, there are even warnings about them on the traffic signs. If you need a fix of zombie but are getting a bit tired of the clichés, here are two classics that look at zombies in the context of West Indian legend. Wade Davis got interested in zombies via the case of Clairvius Narcisse, a Haitian man pronounced dead, buried, yet who rose again as a true survivor of zombiesm. Davis's explorations found startling evidence about how poisons could manipulate the appearance of life and death to create the "living dead" as part of an elaborate means of social control.

<http://fireandword.blogspot.com/2009...>

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### Mike says

Dr. Wade Davis, a Harvard-trained ethnobotanist, went to Haiti to embark on a journey in search of the botanical toxins used in the process of producing "zombies" in voodoo rituals. This might sound like the stuff of sci-fi or horror if it had not really happened: in fact, Davis wrote two books on the topic, one that would become a blockbuster film (*The Serpent and the Rainbow*) and this, a more nuanced work of serious scholarship on the topic.

Davis's experiences and findings are more than enchanting—simply those rare cases where truth is in fact stranger than fiction and one could not hardly imagine a more complex web of intrigue. It helps that Davis is also a very skilled writer—a fact made even more acute in his later works such as *One River*. This is, to be sure, a true-life adventure story well-told but Davis also includes enough of the hard science behind the actual "ethnobiology" of zombiesm to fascinate on this level, also, although further lab research has been done in the past two decades that calls into question Davis' thesis that anhydrotetrodotoxin is the primary active compound in the "zombie powder" used to make humans into supposed "zombies". All in all, a powerful tale told at the hands of a skilled storyteller, scientist, and journalist. Few books are as odd, as keen, and as engrossing as this one and hardly any science/nature writer has the verve of Davis at his best.

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### Christine says

Zombies or the living dead are real folks, just not the man-eating ones. And what people fear most about them is becoming one not being eaten by one. Bizango secret societies in Haiti and their enforcement of laws, the organic concoction given to individuals to slow heartbeat, the effects of someone coming out of the

death-like coma within the community, reasons why individuals face such punishment, and what is being done about the living dead all rolled into one well-written, very readable ethnography. If you ever wanted to really know what's up with the living dead, this is a good start.

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### **Nightshade Purplebroom says**

A highly provocative, informative and well-researched look into Vodoun religion, the role of Zombification in Haitian society, and the fauna and flora that are used in the making of the Zombie powder.

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### **Ushan says**

Davis is an anthropologist who believes that the Haitian stories about zombies are real: Haitian warlocks can administer a potent neurotoxin derived from Caribbean fish related to the Pacific fugu, which paralyzes the body but does not cross the blood-brain barrier; the paralyzed person is pronounced dead, buried, then dug out and enslaved. He met a man who claimed to have been made a zombie by his brother because of a land dispute. Other researchers are unconvinced.

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### **Virdilak says**

Excellent book about vodoun and zombi.

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### **Clivemichael says**

Impressive dedication to the topic, some great pictures; and in the mind and on the pages. Stimulating entertaining writing.

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### **Jake says**

Serpent & Rainbow goes to grad school.

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### **Scott says**

I read this almost immediately after *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, and unfortunately, a lot of the text of that book is quoted wholesale in this one. This is probably the more important book from a scientific standpoint, but it's a less-exciting read than its predecessor, although he has quite a bit of further reflection on the topic here than in that book, which reads like a novel, as well as more detailed examination as to how the puffer fish poison may create "zombies" in a Haitian versus intoxicated Japanese men who eat fugu.

## **WITCHCRAFT says**

Despite the fact that it's non-fiction, it drags your mind to a far away land. For anyone interested in the reality of Voodoo, it's worth tracking down a copy.

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## **ann says**

This needs to be added to our curriculum.

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## **Sparring says**

this is what anthropology is FOR!

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